

92

28 Janson G. #2

An essay

On

Papered March 24<sup>n</sup> 1826

Dysentery

By

James Thomas Gilliam

of

North Carolina

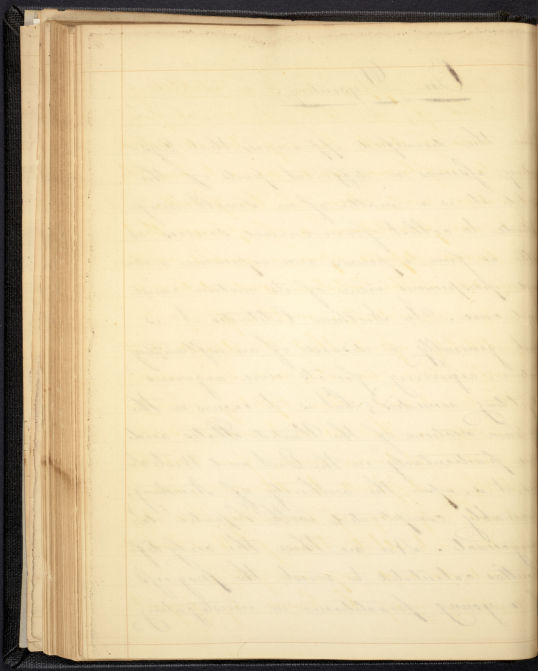
1825.

Oct 20 1880

1.

## On Dysentery.

From the diversified appearances that Dysentery assumes in different parts of the world it is a matter of no small magnitude to collect from various sources as well as from a persons own experience a clear and perspicuous view of its nature cause and cure. In Northern latitudes it is most generally a disease of an inflammatory nature, requiring for its cure vigorous depleting remedies; but as it occurs in the Southern sections of the United States and more particularly in the East and West Indies, it is, upon the authority of Armstrong, invariably complicated with hepatic derangement. Nor are these the only difficulties calculated to arrest the progress of a young practitioner in investigating





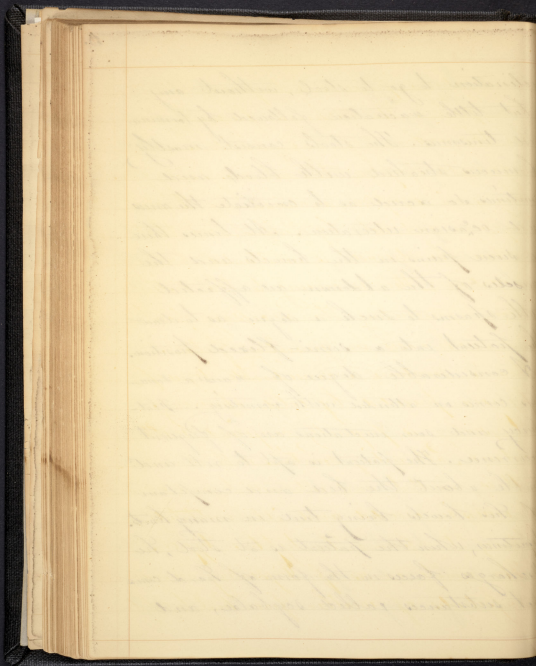
its diversified appearances or in establishing a method of cure that will snatch from the arms of death the unfortunate victims of its influence and secure to him the confidence and esteem of his friends.

While one practitioner is of opinion that the disease depends upon a morbid matter generated in the intestines and deduces his practice accordingly, another of equal respectability asserts that the disease is of an inflammatory character and has recourse to the lance and other depletion remedies for its cure. How we are to reconcile such contradictory statements coming from such high authority is difficult to determine; and the best and only way of surmounting these difficulties is to relate those facts which theory indicates and experience justifies.

Dysentery may be known by frequent



inclination to go to stool, without any  
or but little evacuation followed by tormina  
and tenesmus. The stools consist mostly  
of mucus streaked with blood and  
sometimes so acrid as to excoriate the anus  
and occasion ulceration. At times there  
are severe pains in the bowels and the  
muscles of the abdomen are affected  
with spasms to such a degree as to draw  
the patient into a semi-flexed position.  
A considerable degree of nausea some-  
times comes on attended with vomiting. Flat-  
ulency and sour eructations are of frequent  
occurrence. The patient is apt to roll and  
tumble about the bed and complain  
of his bowels being tied in many knots.  
Sometimes, when the patient is at stool, he  
discharges faeces in the form of hard com-  
pact substances called scybala, and



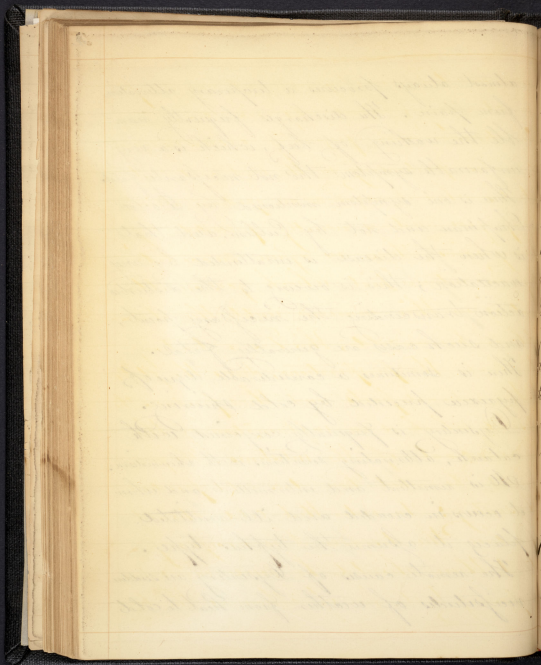
almost always procures a temporary alleviation from pain. The discharges frequently assume the washing of soap, which is a very unfavorable symptom tho' not necessarily fatal.

There is one symptom mentioned by Doctor Chapman and not by Cullen, and that is when the disease is unattended by any evacuation; this is owing to the disturbed action transcending the necessary point, and such cases are generally fatal.

There is sometimes a considerable degree of pyrexia preceded by cold shivering.

Dysentery is frequently conjoined with catarrh, alternating sometimes with rheumatism. It is remittent and intermittent and when it occurs in crowded and ill-ventilated places it assumes the typhus type.

The remote causes of Dysentery are sudden vicissitudes of weather from heat to cold



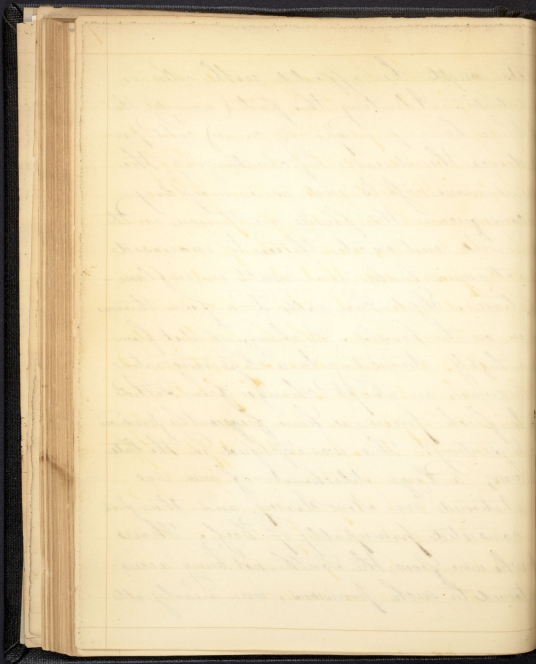
errors in diet, negligence and carelessness  
in cloathing, marsh effluvia &c.

The disease most frequently occurs in warm  
climates particularly in the East and West  
Indies where it reigns as an epidemic almost  
every year and is usually preceded by  
heavy rains, these are again succeeded  
by an intense heat which goes on attr-  
nating in this manner until the atmos-  
phere becomes cold; this has a tendency  
to check the perspiration, drives the fluids  
to the internal parts and thus produces the  
disease which is an inflammation of the  
mucus coat of the intestines. The question  
might be asked how does cold produce  
Dysentery? In order that cold should  
produce the disease it is necessary  
that there should be some cause pre-  
disposing to it for if otherwise the bow-

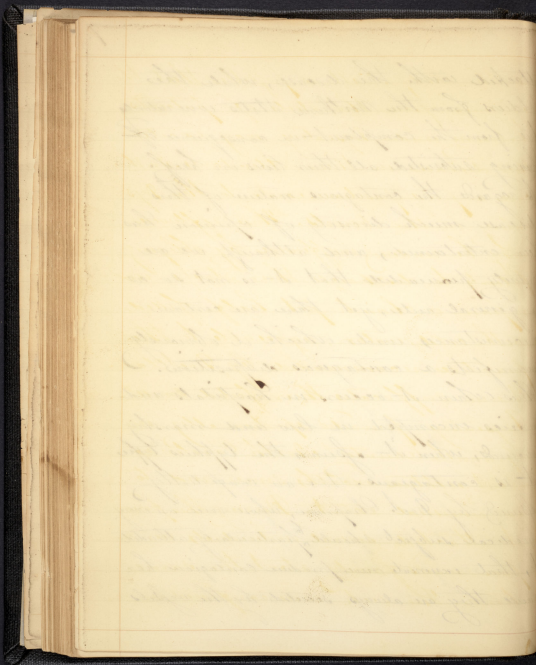




6  
ets might be affected with colic or  
enteritis. Admitting this fact (namely that  
there be a predisposing cause) cold pro-  
duces the disease by constringing the  
cutaneous vessels and as a necessary  
consequence the fluids are thrown on the  
bowels and excite them to increased  
action which soon result in inflam-  
mation. Sydenham calls it a fever thrown  
in on the bowels. "A change of diet from  
a highly stimulating to a less invigorating  
regimen, an abrupt change from salted  
to fresh provisions have frequently produced  
Dysentery." This was exemplified in the late  
war; a large detachment of men was  
stationed in New Jersey and their food  
consisted principally of Beef. Those  
who were from the South, not being accus-  
tomed to such provisions, were nearly all



attacked with the disease, while the  
 soldiers from the Northern States were entirely  
 free from the complaint—in consequence of  
 having subsisted all their lives on beef.  
 As regards the contagious nature of this  
 disease much diversity of opinion has  
 been entertained, and although we are  
 entirely persuaded that it is not so as  
 a general rule, yet there are certain  
 circumstances under which it obviously  
 manifests a contagious disposition.  
 Thus when it occurs in hospitals and  
 armies encamped in low and marshy  
 grounds, when it assumes the typhus type  
 it is contagious. We are confidently  
 assured by Doct. Chapman, whose voice on every  
 medical subject should be particularly attended  
 to, that excrement never produces contagious fever  
 because they are always scented by the vapors



of the body. "It is possible that the effluvia from the stools of patients laboring under Dysentery may excite the disease in their attendants. In this case a predisposition exists to the Dysentery in the bowels. These effluvia may be rendered inoffensive by obliging patients to discharge their stools in a pan or chamber pot half filled with cold water, agreeable to the practice recommended by Doct Clark. It will suffocate their foetid smell".

Dysentery prevailed epidemically in Granville County North Carolina about eighteen months since and to an unusual extent. During this period it attacked several individuals in a poor man's family about the same time. The sick were confined in a



small, dirty and badly aired log cabin, and for the want of proper assistance were under the necessity of discharging the contents of their bowels beneath the floor of a plank. The putrefaction of the faeces added to the already impaired air of a dirty hut, infected every individual in the family and several friends who visited the house, and gave such a malignancy to the disease that in the short space of eight days it swept off every child (six in number) of the bereaved parents and one of the visitors. Several others, infected at this house, who subsequently placed in a pure atmosphere, escaped but with difficulty.

The most singular fact connected with these cases is, that they all obviously,





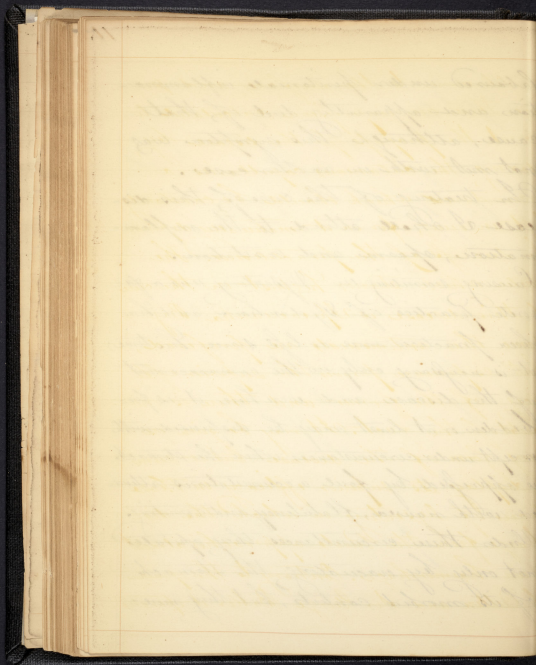


laboured under peritoneal inflammation and apparently died of that cause, although this symptom was not met with in another case.

In treating of the cure of this disease I shall attend to the inflammation, spasm and irritation.

Causing vomiting in Dysentery was a favorite practice of Sydenham and has been practiced more or less since his times; it is necessary only in the commencement of the disease and were here it is forbidden or at least may be dispensed with except under circumstances where the stomach is oppressed by foul accumulations attended with nausea, flatulency and vomiting.

Under these circumstances they operate not only by evacuating the stomach of its morbid contents, but they more-



over determine to the surface and produce there an impression calculated to subvert the progress of the disease by relaxing the cutaneous capillaries, a circumstance which should be constantly kept in view, for on it materially depends the success of the practitioner. The emetic which stands highest in the cure of this disease is Ipecacuanha. By some the antimonials are preferred, but experience proves the superior efficacy of the former - and there is no doubt of the fact. It may be given in every form of the disease but it seems to display its superior efficacy in those species of Dysentery in which the discharge from the bowels approaches almost to an hæmorrhage. Contrary to the opinion of Cullen and Sir George Baker it operates



by relaxing the surface. Spices may be given by itself, but it is best to combine it with some other articles that will be presently mentioned.

There is no remedy which displays such prompt and decisive benefit in this disease as blood-letting.

By some it is relied on almost exclusively with a few auxiliaries; and pathology of the disease highly recommends such a course. In this disease there is considerable spasmodic constriction of the intestines, which is in many instances relieved by venesection. In some cases this disease is attended with an oppressed pulse and here the practitioner, unless very cautious, is apt to be deceived; it is recommended under such circumstances to keep the fingers

八

constantly on the pulse while the blood  
 is flowing, carefully watching its motion,  
 and if it be found that it sinks  
 under the operation prudence directs that  
 the bleeding should be discontinued,  
 if, on the contrary, the pulse become  
 more voluminous and soft the bleeding  
 should be carried as far as the exist-  
 ing circumstances of the patient will  
 admit. By attending to the above cir-  
 cumstances many a patient has been cured,  
 who, ~~under~~ a different mode of treatment,  
 would, probably, have died, I have seen  
 this exemplified, in more than one instance  
 in the practice of Do<sup>r</sup>. William V. Taylor,  
 who stands very high as a practitioner  
 in this state. There are other advan-  
 tages attending blood-letting in this  
 disease; it awakens the sensibility of



I have the honor to acknowledge the receipt of your letter of the 10th inst. in relation to the matter of the application for a license to the undersigned. I am sorry to hear that you are unable to attend to the matter at present. I will endeavor to do so as soon as possible. I am, Sir, very respectfully,  
 Yours, J. H. [Signature]  
 [Address]



the stomach and renders it susceptible to the operation of future remedies; it moreover changes the hot dry and parched skin for a moist and relaxed one.

In urgent cases and where the system indicates venous congestion "blood-letting" is imperiously demanded, be it apt to terminate fatally or end in a chronic state? When the inflammation runs high twenty ounces, or even more may be taken at once; this is apt to cut short the disease and if it should not be thus successful the bleeding should be repeated even in the course of twenty four or thirty six hours. Topical bleeding is an invaluable remedy in Dysentery; it is best adapted to those cases of the disease where the patient has just recovered from a severe attack of bilious



fever or some other disease, where the system is excessively debilitated and where general bleeding would prove highly mischievous. Under these circumstances it is astonishing what happy effects are produced by detracting a small quantity of blood from the abdomen. For this purpose leeches are preferred as they occasion but little or no irritation; when these cannot be procured cups answer the purpose very well and should be applied as near as possible to the seat of the pain. As auxiliary to local bleeding I will here mention the astonishing effect produced by warm fomentations. They relax the skin and produce a centrifugal determination of the fluids, and thus indirectly deplete the deeper seated seated laboring vessels. Those who have not



entrusted their efficacy can but imperfectly estimate the benefit resulting from the practice. Local blood letting may likewise be resorted to when general bleeding does not relieve the pain.

After vomiting, if necessary and bleeding have been permitted, purging comes in as a very important remedy.

Purgatives should be used until the intestines are thoroughly evacuated, and if the disease does not yield to this course we should then have recourse to other modes of treatment such as sweating, blistering or salivation.

In mild cases Castor oil acts very well but in severe attacks it must give way to more potent remedies. Calomel has deservedly acquired a high reputation in the cure of Dysentery; and as the disease

and which has been the subject of much  
discussion. The first of these is the  
question of the nature of the  
evidence. It is not sufficient to  
show that a man has been  
found guilty of a crime, but it  
must be shown that he has  
been found guilty of a crime  
which is of a nature to  
show that he is a dangerous  
person. This is the principle  
which has been applied in the  
case of the man who was  
found guilty of a crime which  
was of a nature to show that  
he was a dangerous person.

occurs in the Southern States there is no remedy calculated to supersede it.

In warm climates Dysentery is frequently complicated with hepatic derangements and as calomel has a strong affinity for the liver it is natural to suppose that it constitutes one of the principle means in combating the disease. By Armstrong, Johnson and Elphinstone it is almost exclusively relied on and Doct. Johnson relates his own case in which the only thing that gave him any relief or fact saved his life was a mercurial salivation. Practitioners are not at all agreed as to the quantity that should be given. Some give it in doses of three or four grains three or four times a day to produce ptyalism. Others as Armstrong and Johnson administer it in scruple







doses and they say that such quantities harass the bowels less than smaller doses. Doct. Chapman prefers giving it combined with Opium and Spicacanea and there is no doubt of the superior efficacy of the method.

Thus administered it not only operates on the bowels, but likewise relieves pain and determines to the surface, <sup>thus supplying</sup> ~~there~~ of the most important indications in the cure of this disease. Opium may be resorted to in this disease much earlier than some have thought. In the commencement there is a considerable degree of irritation with spasms of the colon which are very effectually relieved by opium. Last spring a young man came to me with Dysentery; he complained of considerable

*[Faint, illegible handwriting in cursive script, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*

pain in his bowels and a sensation of having his bowels tied into knots and other symptoms indicating the existence of the disease. I immediately bled him to sixteen or twenty ounces and then gave him fifteen grains of calomel combined with half a grain of opium; his pain subsided in a short time and with the occasional use of some of the mild cathartics he fast recovered and in a short time was able to pursue his ordinary avocations. The diaphoretic plan of treating this disease is highly recommended particularly by Mosely; and I think there can be but little doubt of the success of the practice. It should, however, be constantly remembered that prior to attempts to produce perspiration

*[Faint, illegible handwriting on lined paper, likely bleed-through from the reverse side.]*

the pulse and febrile action should be previously reduced, for by not attending to these precautionary measures the attempts to produce perspiration will not only prove unavailing, but may likewise prove highly detrimental to the safety of the patient. When deaphorics are indicated, it is a very common practice in this section of the country to prescribe the asclepias decumbens in powder united with Dover's powder and few remedies are found to answer the end with more certainty.

Sixteen grains of calomel combined with four of opium and eight of ipecac made into eight pills, one to be taken every two or three hours as circumstances may require, constitute an excellent prescription in producing diaphoresis; I allays



intestinal irritation, promotes perspi-  
 ration and operates on the bowels. This  
 is the favorite prescription of Doctor  
 Chapman and is applicable to a great  
 number of cases. A more certain and  
 powerful diaphoretic is the Dover powder;  
 but when there is a necessity for evacuating  
 the alimentary canal the former prescrip-  
 tion will probably answer better. As  
 auxiliary to the action of diaphoretics  
 nothing answers better than the warm  
 bath, it operates by relaxing the cuta-  
 neous vessels and cleansing the skin, the  
 effect of which very often counteracts  
 the successful operation of the sweating  
 remedies. The warm bath is not of ab-  
 solute importance in every form of the  
 disease at least it may be dispensed  
 with, but in extreme emergencies it forms

*[Faint, mirrored handwriting, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page.]*



an invaluable remedy particularly in children. Fomentations may sometimes be used with marked advantage,

Cooperating with the preceding remedies the application of blisters is attended with considerable advantage; as in the case of diaphoretics they should never be employed until arterial action and fever generally be sufficiently subdued.

By some they are applied to the extremities; in order to produce their best effects they should be applied to the abdomen and as near the seat of the pain as possible, but in extreme cases I see no reason why they may not be applied both to the extremities and abdomen. "The efficacy of blisters depends on counter irritation and not upon the quantity of fluid evacuated."

in the last, many families of the  
children, & sometimes of the  
parents, were made to suffer,  
in consequence of the small  
pox, which was introduced  
into the country, by the  
arrival of the first ship  
from the West Indies, in  
the year 1673. The  
disease was so violent,  
that it was necessary  
to bury the dead in  
the open air, and  
the survivors were  
so weak, that they  
could not be  
employed in any  
manner of labour.  
The disease was  
so general, that it  
was necessary to  
close the schools,  
and the children  
were confined to  
their homes. The  
disease was so  
violent, that it was  
necessary to bury  
the dead in the  
open air, and the  
survivors were so  
weak, that they  
could not be  
employed in any  
manner of labour.

In this disease the patient is sometimes  
 harassed by certain local affections,  
 as *hemorrhoid* and *tumour*, which occa-  
 sionally prove very distressing. To relieve  
 these symptoms the oleaginous mixture  
 answers very well. Malted butter with-  
 out salt or rancidity is very good,  
 animal oils being less irritating than  
 vegetable. Anodyne injections are likewise  
 good, but frequently the instrument by  
 which they are thrown up is irritating  
 and disagreeable and as a substitute a  
 suppository of opium, answers extreme-  
 ly well, being readily introduced into  
 the anus without the patient being  
 scarcely sensible of the operation.

As the bowels in this disease are  
 very irritable and as the slightest causes  
 are apt to bring back the disease in

The first thing I noticed  
when I stepped out of the  
train was the cold air.  
It was a sharp contrast to the  
warmth of the car. I shivered  
slightly as I walked towards  
the platform. The people  
were all looking at me with  
curious eyes. I felt a bit  
awkward, but I tried to  
keep my composure. I  
walked quickly to the  
exit, not wanting to  
linger. The air was  
crisp and clean. I  
took a deep breath and  
felt a sense of freedom.  
The world was so different  
from what I had  
experienced before. I  
was in a new place,  
and I was excited.  
The people were  
friendly and helpful.  
I felt like I had  
found a new home.  
The air was so good.  
I loved it.

a more aggravated form particular attention should be paid to diet and drink. The diet should be of that kind which is easy of digestion and which may be taken without producing the least stimulating effect. The patient should not overload his stomach by eating too much at once of any thing; on the contrary he should eat frequently and but little at a time, and as simplicity in diet is of considerable importance in the cure of disease the patient should confine himself as much as possible to one article alone. The best articles of diet are rice, panada, sago arrow root and such like. What I have said of diet may with equal propriety be applied to drink.



The drinks usually recommended in this disease are rice water, glass and tea, gum arabic mucilage, slippery elm &c.

As I have before observed this disease sometimes assumes the *Typhus* form particularly when it occurs in Hospitals, armies encamped in low and marshy grounds and in ill-ventilated places.

The remedies for this form of *Dysentery* are blisters, stimulents and pationation. Emetics have been used by many eminent practitioners and found to be very beneficial. While the patient is under a mercurial course for this form of the disease he should be sustained by cordials and diffusible stimulents. The exhibition of nitric acid, especially if the patient have







weak bowels, is attended with very happy effects. It diffuses an agreeable warmth over the system and supports the tone of the intestines.

Dysentery frequently puts on an intermittent type, having regular exacerbations every day or every other day. The Peruvian bark is the remedy to be relied on under such circumstances. It sometimes becomes necessary to have recourse to the bark in very low and advanced stage of the disease, when the intestines have a tendency to mortification. Such cases, however, are not very frequent, but when they do occur are for the most part fatal.

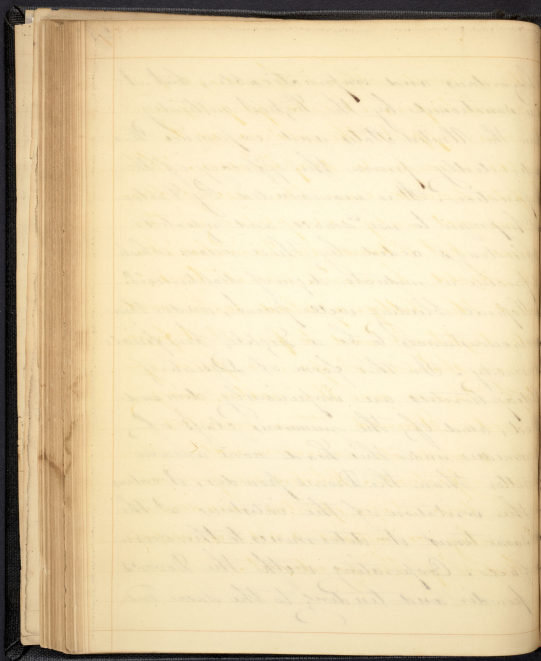
The last form of this disease that I shall notice is the chronic. It is of frequent occurrence and is commonly



The consequence of a defective cure  
 or bad management of the acute stage.  
 While I was attending the lectures last  
 winter I saw several patients laboring  
 under this form of Dysentery in the  
 Philadelphia Almshouse and the  
 practice of the attending physicians  
 and the symptoms which character-  
 ized the disease made a considerable  
 impression on my mind. These cases  
 were attended with an irritable state  
 of the intestines, frequent small vacua-  
 tions, considerable pain, depraved  
 appetite, indigestion, dry and parched  
 skin, meagre face, sunk eye and  
 sunk countenance, all showing a de-  
 termination of blood to the internal  
 parts. Bleeding here, upon a superficial  
 view of the case, would seem to be



hazardous and impracticable, but it is sanctioned by the highest authority in the United States and experience has decidedly proven the efficacy of the practice. It is recommended by Doctor Chapman to use "small and repeated bleedings aided by those means which procure a moderate degree of diaphoresis". Topical bleeding will prove, under these circumstances, to be a highly beneficial remedy. In this form of Dysentery diaphoretics are imperiously demanded, and of the numerous class of remedies under this head none answers better than the Dover's powder, it calms the irritation of the intestines & the same time it determines to the surface. Cooperating with the Dover's powder and tending to the same end



is the flannel roller or bandage,  
 it removes torpor, obviates griping and  
 tenesmus, supports the intestines and  
 excites a moderate diaphoresis. The  
 benefits derived from the use of flannel  
 are not only exemplified in this  
 disease but likewise in Diarrhoea &c.

It should be carried several times  
 round the belly, applied with mod-  
 erate tightness and to prevent it from  
 slipping shoulder straps or a piece of  
 cloth thrown over the roller, may  
 be used. Should these remedies  
 fail a moderate saturation will often  
 prove effectual. Blisters are good and  
 in the low stage spiritus mindereri,  
 or <sup>or</sup> whey or nitrous acid is useful  
 in keeping up the excitement.



*[Faint, mirrored handwriting, likely bleed-through from the reverse side of the page. The text is illegible due to fading and mirroring.]*